

**TESTIMONY OF BRYAN KLOCHACK**  
**(Representing MICHIGAN CONNECTIONS ACADEMY and FUSION ACADEMY OF MICHIGAN)**

Good afternoon, Chairman Pavlov and esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee. I am privileged to spend a few moments speaking with you today in enthusiastic support of the seven-bill education reform package introduced in the Senate last month.

My name is Bryan Klochack, and I am the principal of two high-quality schools in Michigan: a K-12 online program, available statewide, called Michigan Connections Academy (or "MICA"), authorized by our charter with Ferris State University, and a Detroit-centered high school program focused on serving Michigan's dropouts called Fusion Academy of Michigan. I thank you for that opportunity to speak with you about the proposed reforms.

In my capacity as principal, I represent over 600 K-12 students and 30 administrators, teachers, and staff of both MICA and Fusion Academy. These families greatly benefit from the effective, quality education we are providing to Michigan families. Our program serves students in grades K-12 statewide with a full-time program, including high-quality online and print curriculum, highly-qualified, licensed MI teachers, field trips and student interaction, and participation in all mandated public school requirements, including state testing. Both MICA and Fusion Academy create quality, highly-skilled jobs for Michigan residents.

Before I speak specifically to our programs here in Michigan, I would like to speak briefly about the broader story of Connections Education, the parent company of our education partner.

Connections Education is the leading national provider of quality virtual public school programs serving grades kindergarten through 12. Founded in 2001 the focus has always been on ensuring access for students across America to the virtual education options they need for academic and emotional success, using charter schools as the primary means of serving them.

As we begin our 10<sup>th</sup> year this fall, Connections Academy schools will serve nearly 40,000 students through full-time virtual public schools in 22 states, plus part-time online and blended learning programs with hundreds of public school districts through the Connections Learning division. We believe in and create educational programs that are effective, challenging, and motivating for our students.

Our students meet or exceed state proficiency standards as measured by state standardized tests, beat the national average on Advanced Placement exams, and have been accepted to leading colleges and universities, including Bowdoin, Harvard, and Ohio State, to name just a few. Almost 75% of Connections Academy graduates go on to post-secondary education, while the remaining 25% enter the military or careers upon graduation. Our schools hold accreditation from prestigious independent accreditation bodies including AdvancEd, the international accreditation body, and many regional accreditation organizations as well.

As many of you know, the 2010-11 school year was our first in operation at Michigan Connections Academy, and we proudly served at our cap of 400 students. By any measure, it was a very successful year. Students who had previously struggled in other school settings thrived in our program. In a survey conducted by an independent third-party market research firm in February 2011, a remarkable 96% of those surveyed agreed that MICA's curriculum was high quality; 95% reported that their children

were satisfied with our school program. On the other 4 measured areas of satisfaction, our parents rated MICA at 94% or greater. Complete results of the survey are available. I have brought copies of these key metrics for you review. Finally, over 80% of our students and 100% of our teachers returned for our second year, further proof of the success of and satisfaction with the program.

In this, our 2<sup>nd</sup> year as a school, the legislation allows us to serve 400 students in MICA, as well as add 1 additional student in MICA for each dropout student we serve in Fusion Academy, up to a maximum of 1,000 students served by both programs. Because of the imposed enrollment caps, we have had to turn away many applicants who otherwise would have enrolled in the program. We are pleased that Senator Colbeck's bill, SB 619, will remove these caps. No other school in Michigan has a limit on the number of kids it enrolls, and we should not be treated any differently.

The demand for online school programs in Michigan is strong and growing rapidly. In our first year of operation last year, we had over 2,500 applicants for only 400 available spots. This year, we experienced tremendous demand for our two programs, with over 3,000 applications received for the 1,000 we can serve collectively in the two programs.

There are many types of students for whom online learning holds great promise. The students we serve each day include 33% minority students, almost 10% special needs students, over 50% Free and Reduced Meals (FARM), and many Gifted and Talented students. Many students who struggle in traditional classrooms blossom in our program. For many, it is a last resort after challenges to find the education they need in other educational settings.

We appreciate the real education reforms contained in Senate Bills 618 through 624. We fully support the expansion of charter schools, cyber schools, and broader school choices for all Michigan families. We know that along with this education reform package comes increased competition, not only from other charter schools and cyber programs, but also from traditional public schools. We welcome the competition, knowing that it will result in two unambiguous outcomes: improved opportunities for school choice for families, and gains in student achievement. These bills will spur innovation and improve quality, and encourage only the best charter schools to flourish and replicate their models. We especially appreciate the expansion of the number of cyber charters that can serve Michigan families, as well as the lifting of enrollment caps on such programs. No two schools are identical and families need options in programs offered just as they do with having choice. As I have mentioned, this will also have significant impact for the many families who wanted to use these programs this year but were unable to do so because of limited space.

Besides the enrollment cap, there are several obstacles that we face in our want to offer high-quality online learning to all Michigan families who can benefit from it. Our Fusion Program, designed to bring drop outs back to school to finish their high school diplomas, was hampered by the proper identification of dropouts in the CEPI system in many instances, preventing us from serving students who are indeed dropouts but are not coded as such. The reporting system is fundamentally flawed and needs work in order to accurately reflect students' status. Additionally, ideally Michigan would assist the schools designed to serve dropouts to ensure broad awareness of the program's availability to this population. This issue, like enrollment caps, is addressed in SB 619, but know that we have had to turn away students due to the current requirements. Thank you for removing this barrier.

Another issue worthy of your attention is the fact that statewide cyber schools do not receive special education funding from any student served beyond the home district of the program (Ingham) and its

contiguous districts. This caused over 25 special needs students to be served without funding that should follow them. The school served them at its own expense in school year 2010-11 because it was the right thing to do, but we respectfully request your help in solving this ongoing problem. I would welcome a continued dialogue with you in order to fix these problems. We have a plan to address each of them and would be pleased to discuss with you at your convenience.

I would like to also share several parent testimonials:

*"I know I have said it before!! But you teachers are the BEST!!! From last year to this year to all the new ones we haven't had, from meeting you all and all the help you give my children and I, I thank you!! My kiddos can't wait to start school every day!! We are looking forward to yet another great year with MICA!!!"*

*"We appreciate you ALL....."*

*"... our children [were] in the public school over the last two years[and it] resulted in three kids who previously loved learning begging to not have to go to school. The joy of learning, you know... that "suck the marrow out of life, climbing trees, catching butterflies, and hours of reading in a hammock just because you can" had vanished. The kids were on a bus at the crack of dawn and dumped on the curb 9 hours later with no time for pet projects, the kind of projects that foster lifelong innovation and change-the-world-Leonardo DaVinci-out of the box thinking."*







*"We were painfully aware that our children were not being equipped. I had heard about MICA and enrolled our children immediately. We were waitlisted and we found that being waitlisted is an awesome opportunity to prepare yourself ahead of time for the jump when your number is called. Choosing MICA was a no-brainer for us. They have innovative programs designed to challenge active learners, a broad range of extra-curricular clubs, and teachers that get giddy hearing about the side-projects their students decide to invest in on their own."*

*"Long story short, MICA is a buffet Mom and I am fat and happy.... Pretty much sums up how we all feel around here about MICA."*

Finally, we encourage you to visit our school any time to witness the great things happening in our programs, and to meet our staff and students. We have hosted over 50 MDE staff members and 30 legislators this year alone, and would welcome your visit.

On behalf of Michigan Connections Academy and Fusion Academy of Michigan, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to address the Committee today, and thank you for your support of this forward-thinking, innovative education legislation.

Parent Satisfaction Results  
Michigan Connections Academy  
SY 2010-11

Michigan Connections Academy 2011 Parent Satisfaction Survey Results		
<p>96%</p> <p>of parents agree that the <b>curriculum</b> is high quality.</p> 	<p>95%</p> <p>of parents agree their <b>children</b> are satisfied with the program.</p> 	<p>95%</p> <p>of parents are satisfied with <b>teachers'</b> helpfulness.</p> 
<p>94%</p> <p>of parents are satisfied with the <b>variety</b> of learning activities.</p> 	<p>96%</p> <p>of parents satisfied with the <b>helpfulness</b> of their child's principal.</p> 	<p>94%</p> <p>of parents agree that our <b>technology</b> tools improve their child's learning experience.</p> 

*Based on a survey of both Michigan Connections Academy and Connections Academy families conducted in February 2011 by Leo J. Shapiro and Associates.*

# Quick Facts



## What Is Michigan Connections Academy?

- An accredited, full-time K-12 public school at home authorized by Ferris State University Charter Schools Office
- A free program, no tuition
- Part of a family of Connections Academy schools serving students nationwide

## What Does Michigan Connections Academy Provide?

- A high-quality curriculum, including textbooks, materials, and online resources
- A loaned computer and Internet subsidy
- Professional, certified teachers
- Community connections: field trips and activities that bring students and families together

## How Does Our Unique Program Work?

- **Personalized Instruction** provides the right degree of challenge.
- **Certified Teachers** direct learning, evaluate student work, and collaborate with families to individualize the instruction and meet academic needs.
- **High-Quality Curriculum** is aligned to state standards so you can be sure your student is mastering all of the essentials.
- **Parents (Learning Coaches)** facilitate learning under the direction of Michigan certified teachers and use their unique knowledge of their students to help individualize the program.
- **Leading-Edge Technology** keeps track of students' progress, connects teachers and families, and enhances the learning experience.

## How Can I Apply?

We are currently accepting applications for the 2011-12 school year. Apply online at [www.ConnectionsAcademy.com/mica](http://www.ConnectionsAcademy.com/mica).

### Grades K-12

**Principal** Bryan Klochack

**Open to** full-time students throughout Michigan

**School Starts** September 2011

### School Address

2140 University Park Drive  
Suite 270  
Okemos, MI 48864  
517-507-5390



## What Technology Do I Need?

Michigan Connections Academy provides a loaned computer and Internet subsidy at no charge. However, if you choose to use your own computer, it must meet or exceed the following specifications:

## Hardware Specifications

### Minimum Recommended

Processor Speed: 800 MHz Intel Pentium III or better  
RAM: 512 MB  
CD-ROM: 8X or better  
Monitor: 15-inch color display  
Video: XGA (1024 X 768 pixel resolution)  
Audio: 16-bit sound card  
Internet Connection: 56 kbps modem (minimum)  
and/or 10/100 network card for cable/DSL  
Microphone and speakers

### Recommended for Maximum Performance

Processor Speed: 1.5 GHz Intel Pentium IV or better  
RAM: minimum of 1024 MB  
CD-ROM: 8X or better  
Monitor: 17-inch color display  
Video: XGA (1024 X 768 pixel resolution)  
Audio: 16-bit sound card  
Internet Connection: High-speed connection  
(e.g., cable, DSL)  
Microphone and speakers

## Operating System

Microsoft® Windows® XP, Vista, or 7

## Web Browser

Microsoft Internet Explorer® version 7 or higher for Windows  
Mozilla Firefox version 3 or higher for Windows

## Software

Microsoft® Office XP, 2003, or 2007, or compatible software for word processing, creating and reading spreadsheets, and creating presentations. You will not be able to complete school assignments if your software cannot open and save files using Microsoft Word, Excel®, and PowerPoint® formats.

Latest version of Adobe® Acrobat® Reader® (free download available)

Latest version of Adobe® Flash® Player (free download available)

Latest version of Windows Media® Player (free download available)

Windows, Microsoft Office, and Microsoft Internet Explorer are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. Adobe and Acrobat Reader are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries.

Connections Academy admits students and conducts all educational programs, activities, and employment practices without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, creed, sexual orientation, disability, or any other legally protected classification.